Annual Report

acat

ALBERTA COUNCIL
ON ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

2014–2015

acat 40

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Alberta Government

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Message from the Chair

Dear Honourable Minister Lori Sigurdson:

On behalf of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), please find enclosed ACAT's Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 2015.

The year covered by this report has been one of new developments that have great promise for the future. ACAT has continued to provide the expected leadership for learner pathways, mobility and transfer in Alberta's post-secondary system. ACAT is the glue that holds Campus Alberta together, and its primary interest is student success. This year, in addition to business as usual, there have been exciting initiatives that will benefit students in the years to come.

We have taken significant steps towards improving student and institutional access to Alberta's transfer system and learner pathways. We launched a mobile App that enables students to access the transfer system and high school equivalencies information on their mobile devices. The Transfer Alberta Search Tool is being improved and aligned with the App to make it more functional. This work is a prelude to completely renovating the Transfer Agreement and Archival Retrieval System and supports for pathways to make them more accessible. We have conducted extensive consultations within the Alberta system to determine our stakeholder needs. We are also working with other Provinces as this change holds the possibility of greater connectivity with a number of provincial transfer systems.

ACAT has increased the number of articulation committees by establishing committees on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and Dual Credit. These committees are innovative in that they focus on types of pathways rather than academic disciplines. Articulation committees are designed to build the culture of transfer at the grass roots and they are meeting with considerable success. Perhaps the most exciting development with these committees is that some of them have established fruitful relations with corresponding committees in British Columbia. These connections have produced creative new ideas.

We are continuing to look at the possibility that learning outcomes, rather than course inputs, could become more the basis for transfer. We have an ACAT sub-committee looking at these opportunities and we are considering ways in which ACAT can take a leading role in getting discussion going within the Alberta system. In this initiative, we will work with the Campus Alberta Quality Council.

This year, the ACAT council approved a strategic research plan that is predicated on the assumption that we need to know more about how well the Alberta transfer system is working for students and institutions. During the year, 17,000 students moved from one institution to another in Alberta, and yet we do not really know how smooth the pathways were for those students or how successful they were. The way to know more is by conducting research on learner pathways and the student experience. We now await approval of funding to implement the research plan.

As my comments have implied, ACAT is very much a player in the development of interprovincial transfer leading to a national system in the future. We work directly with our colleagues in other provinces, as well as through bodies like the Western Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (WestCAT), the Pan Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT), and the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA).

My introduction touches some highlights of the past year. There are more items and more detail in the report itself.

I must recognize the contributions of the dedicated ACAT Council members and the capable and hard working staff of the ACAT Secretariat, without whom nothing would happen. Nor would we succeed in what we do without the support of member institutions, the Ministry and its Minister.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robin A. Fisher
Chair

2013–2016 Action Plan

DIRECTIONAL STATEMENT

ACAT represents a balanced voice for Campus Alberta. ACAT provides leadership to influence policy, highlight/promote best practices, and create a system for access that serves all learners.

MANDATE

Established in 1974, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) is an advisory agency accountable to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education and, in support of Campus Alberta, responsible for providing advice and guidance regarding post-secondary admission and transfer policy.

ACAT works with its stakeholders for the benefit of learners to ensure smooth transitions from secondary to post-secondary and post-secondary to post-secondary.

VISION

Alberta's post-secondary institutions work cooperatively to provide a transfer system that is responsive to the needs of learners in the matters of admissions, transfer credit, and recognition of prior learning.

MISSION

The mission of ACAT is to be a catalyst for beneficial change and an advocate for learners in the areas of post-secondary admission and transfer throughout Campus Alberta. ACAT provides leadership and direction, as a cornerstone of Campus Alberta, in the improvement of educational opportunities for Alberta students through inter-institutional transfer. ACAT is committed to supporting and improving communication among Alberta post-secondary institutions and to promoting the advantages of a system of education, with all that this means for educational planning for the benefit of learners.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The Council endorses the following as basic to its purpose and activities:

(a) Support for Campus Alberta's core objectives by facilitating learners to successfully navigate the Transfer System and foster lifelong learning in the advanced education system.

(b) Student access to higher education and the opportunity for student mobility from secondary to post-secondary and post-secondary to post-secondary in Alberta shall be optimized.

(c) Negotiation of opportunities for student mobility shall be based on the recognition that while learning experiences may differ in a variety of ways, their substance may be virtually equivalent in terms of learning outcomes and rigor.

(d) Effective academic advising, career counseling and optimum mobility require that the student have prior knowledge of at least the minimum transfer credit which can be awarded.

(e) Individual institutions have the primary responsibility for instructional programs, even though responsibility for higher education is shared among various constituents. The responsibility of institutions includes program design and delivery, determination of academic prerequisites and student admission criteria, and certification of the academic achievement of students.

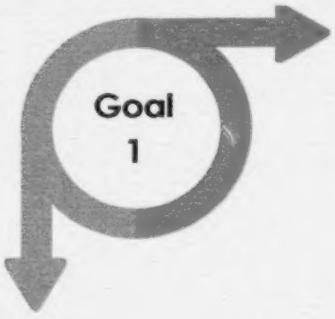
(f) Institutions have the responsibility and the prerogative to investigate the total educational background of applicants seeking admission.

(g) Post-secondary institutions are committed to developing and maintaining clearly stated policies and procedures for consideration of transfer credit and to applying them in a consistent manner.

(h) After students are granted admission to an institution under a transfer arrangement, they shall be granted the same rights and privileges as students who began their studies at the institution.

Goals, Priority Initiatives and Results

ACAT identified five goals and associated priority initiatives in its *2013-2016 Action Plan* to guide the Council's and Secretariat's activities. ACAT's focus on leadership, collaboration, research, technology, learner pathways and mobility will be reflected within each of the goals and their accompanying priority initiatives, followed by results for each goal.



ARTICULATION COMMITTEE MODEL

Articulation committees will continue to bring program heads, faculty and Alberta Education, in a given area of study, together to develop closer collegial relationships, exchange information and discuss issues related to admissions and transfer.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES:

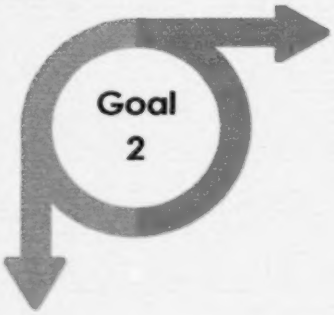
- Articulation Sub-committee to review committee model, including process to identify areas for expansion and to ensure sustainability.
- Continue to expand the number of articulation committees in the Transfer System by two annually.
- Hold annual articulation committee chair meeting.
- Articulation Sub-committee/Council engage articulation committees regarding key ACAT research questions and initiatives (e.g., learning outcomes).

GOAL 1: ARTICULATION COMMITTEE MODEL AND COLLABORATION, INFLUENCE AND MOBILITY RESULTS

Articulation Committees:
Three new articulation committees were initiated, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Dual Credit, and the Sciences. A total of 16 ACAT program area, system-led articulation committees are now present with further expansion in progress. Already approved committees soon to be under development include Wellness, Social Sciences, and Early Learning and Child Care. A review of the articulation committee expansion model is also planned.

Dual Credit:
The ACAT Secretariat continued to provide extensive support and guidance for the Government of Alberta's Provincial Dual Credit Strategy, including through work with involved ministries, the Provincial Dual Credit Steering Committee, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and the new ACAT Dual Credit Articulation Committee.

Articulation Sub-Committee and Annual Articulation Committee Chair Meeting:
Facilitated and participated in the Articulation Chairs 2014 annual meeting, including information sharing about British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) Flexible Pre-Majors (John FitzGibbon) and the joint Alberta/BC Mathematics and Statistical Sciences articulation of Calculus I/II courses between the jurisdictions. ACAT's *Learner Pathways Modernization Initiative* projects, On-Line Search Tool Enhancement and System Replacement Business Needs Assessment were also discussed. Chairs also identified key issues and shared best practices regarding admissions and transfer. Discussion regarding research to base future articulation committee expansion on learner pathways and mobility and transfer agreement data continues.



ADMISSIONS PRACTICES

Admissions Sub-committee will undertake initiatives reflecting ACAT's increased focus and communication on admissions-related issues and learner pathways from secondary to post-secondary.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES:

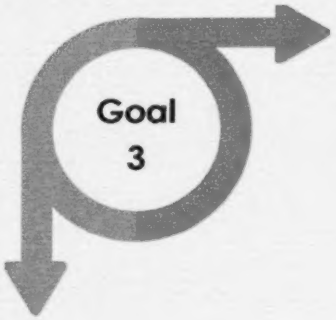
- Conduct survey of Transfer System member institutions to develop an overview and understanding of the current admission practices.
- Engage the Transfer System Contact Persons in discussion on issues related to admission practices at their annual fall meeting.
- Develop a repository/mechanism for sharing admissions information, data, and resources (e.g., high school transitions, dual credit, high school credentialing) with students and counselors and other stakeholders in the K-12 and post-secondary systems.
- Admissions Sub-committee/Council engage stakeholders regarding key ACAT research questions and initiatives (e.g., promising practices).

GOAL 2: ADMISSIONS PRACTICES AND COLLABORATION AND MOBILITY RESULTS

Annual Contact Persons' Meeting 2013:
Facilitated and participated in the annual Contact Persons' meeting and gathered feedback regarding last year's survey questions, the newly launched ACAT *Learner Pathways Modernization Initiative*, and its System Replacement Business Needs Assessment project. Phases and activities were discussed, including focus group sessions in which the Contact Persons were encouraged to participate.

Admissions Sub-Committee:
Initiated plans for information gathering to identify issues and best practices. Led a session with high school and upgrading representatives regarding data gathering for the *Learner Pathways Modernization Initiative.*

Foreign Qualifications Recognition (FQR):
The ACAT Secretariat continued to participate on the Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour ministry-led FQR Steering Committee in 2014, including participation in the March 2014 FQR Forum with a focus on post-secondary bridging programs and participation.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

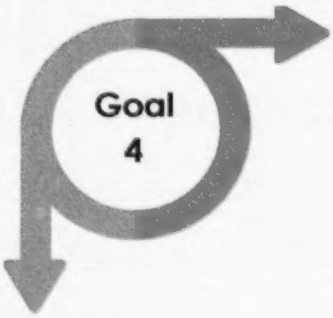
ACAT will continue its examination of the role of learning outcomes in the development and broadening of learner pathways through best practices and models for an outcome-based Transfer System.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES:

- Complete a review of a sample of existing by-program agreements through a comparison of learning outcomes, including identification of a common understanding of a working definition for learning outcomes.
- Develop a pilot block transfer agreement that is founded on identified learning outcomes and is informed by the lessons learned from the sample review of by-program agreements.
- Learner Pathways Sub-committee/Council engage stakeholders regarding key ACAT research questions and initiatives (e.g., block transfer, ACAT/third party learning outcomes research).

GOAL 3: LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COLLABORATION AND MOBILITY RESULTS

Learner Pathways Sub-Committee:
ACAT continued to explore how transfer arrangements can be facilitated through the use of learning outcomes, including dialogue regarding current research and with the ACAT Articulation Sub-Committee on the potential role of articulation committees in furthering how transfer arrangements can be facilitated through the use of learning outcomes. This sub-committee also began connecting with others in the system who are engaging in learning outcomes initiatives, including in the area of business programs.



COMMUNICATION

ACAT will increase engagement and communication with and among Alberta's advanced learning system stakeholders to support learner pathways initiatives and student success.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES:

- Ensure ongoing, regular dialogue between ACAT Chair/Council and Innovation and Advanced Education Senior Ministry officials.
- Contribute to key government initiatives (e.g., funding model and tuition review).
- ACAT will seek out opportunities to enhance communication with and between system stakeholders, including engaging key stakeholders with ACAT's *Spotlight* communication.
- Facilitate provincial conversation about key research topics with ACAT, Campus Alberta Quality Council, and other stakeholders (e.g., student groups, ministries) to increase secondary and post-secondary dialogue.
- Provide students, Student Advisors and other key institution staff with enhanced Transfer Alberta technology tools, information, and training opportunities.
- Assess the viability of the Transfer Agreement Archival Retrieval System (TAARS) and the need for the development of a modernized transfer tool.

GOAL 4: COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION, ACCESS AND MOBILITY RESULTS

Minister Meetings and Ministry Dialogue:
The ACAT Chair engaged in key meetings with the Minister and Assistant Deputy Minister, Advanced Learning and Community Partnerships regarding ACAT, pathways and mobility, and the system, including key leadership, research, collaboration, resource, pan-Canadian, and technology goals and priorities.

Annual Contact Persons' Meeting 2014:
ACAT's Chair and Secretariat facilitated and participated in the annual Contact Persons' meeting, engaging in direct information sharing, input, and dialogue regarding key system issues and ACAT initiatives.

Information Sessions, Meetings, and Training:
Provided sessions/information regarding learner pathways and mobility, the Alberta Transfer System and Transfer Alberta (including TAARS training), and the role and work of ACAT to key groups, including student groups and student leaders (Council of Alberta University Students, the Alberta Students' Executive Council, Learning Clicks Ambassadors, and other Alberta post-secondary student leaders) and Contact Persons.

Monthly Spotlight Communication:
ACAT continued to evolve development of its stakeholder/system monthly communication, *Spotlight*, to highlight learner pathways and mobility activities and stories for institutions and other key stakeholders with a focus on admissions and transfer.

New ACAT SharePoint Site:
A new ACAT SharePoint site is under development to support communication, collaboration, and work by Council, institution Contact Persons, and Articulation Committees. This work will continue over the next 1-2 years.

New Awareness Materials:
ACAT worked with Pulp Studios to begin development of new Transfer Alberta learner pathways awareness materials, including information about the new mobile app and using ACAT and Transfer Alberta's new 2014 visual identity/branding. These materials will be released in 2015.

ACAT's 40th Anniversary:
ACAT celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2014 (1974-2014), including a celebration hosted by the Alberta College of Art + Design in October. As a part of this celebration, ACAT involved stakeholders and past/present Council members with a focus on peoples' stories, contributions, and experiences. ACAT also shared its new 2014 branding for ACAT and Transfer Alberta.

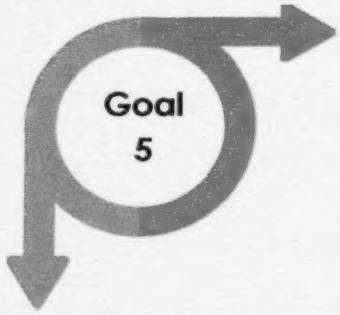
Transfer Alberta Mobile Application:
A new Transfer Alberta Mobile Application was completed and launched for iPhone or Android devices in March 2015. The App is designed to provide learners and student advisors information about admissions, transfer and educational opportunities in Alberta. New data analytics will also be collected as a part of the App's implementation/use.

Learner Pathways Modernization Initiative:
Two projects began to modernize and redevelop tools/supports for learner pathways in Alberta with a focus on Transfer Alberta.

1) The Transfer Alberta Search Tool is being redeveloped to match the functionality of the new Transfer Alberta Mobile App.

2) A business assessment will determine the best ways to move forward with modernizing supports for learner pathways and the transfer system, including system linkages and replacement of the current Transfer Agreement and Archival Retrieval System (TAARS) database, and inclusion of supports for other system information and pathways (e.g., admissions information, high school transitions, dual credit, PLAR).

Eight system and interprovincial focus groups and approximately 10 additional dialogues with students, ministries/system representatives have been completed to date, with a business assessment report under development. Solutions and next steps are planned beginning in the summer of 2015, including Transfer Alberta website redesign.



GOVERNANCE

ACAT will review and align its governance documents and processes to align with the *Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act*, Government of Alberta priorities, and ACAT's new directional statement and priorities regarding leadership.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES:

- Revise Mandate and Roles; Code of Conduct; Principles, Policies and Procedures; Governance Recruitment and Structure documents, and Position Profiles.
- Revise the Alberta Transfer System Membership application and process, including key documents and policy.

GOAL 5: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP, MEMBERSHIP AND DIRECTION RESULTS

Reviews and Initiatives:
ACAT worked with Innovation and Advanced Education to initiate its review of learner pathways and ACAT, which was postponed at this time due to various factors in the Alberta context. Next steps for the ministerial review and ACAT's own review/updates regarding its governance will be determined in 2015-16.

The initial steps of phase 1 of the Business Assessment for the system-wide *Learner Pathways Modernization Initiative* were completed. This initiative continues over the next 1-2 years and will redesign the transfer system and supports, tools, communication, information, and processes for transfer and other related learner pathways in post-secondary. Extensive collaboration with Alberta stakeholders and potentially with several other jurisdictions is also a part of this work.

Council Membership—Appointments:
ACAT reviewed and received ministerial appointment/approval for a new Chair and eight new Council members representing a student member (Council of Alberta University Students); First Nations Institutions; and the Baccalaureate and Applied Studies Institution, Comprehensive Community Institution, Comprehensive Academic and Research Institution, and Polytechnical sectors.

Student Leader Orientation to Government:
The ACAT Secretariat participated in and supported the May 31, 2014 Student Leader Orientation to Government, looking forward to continued collaboration in ACAT work with student leaders in Alberta.

Additional Key Activities/Results

Council and the Secretariat have made a number of accomplishments in support of ACAT's *2013-16 Action Plan* goals and priorities and its core business and ongoing operational requirements. The following bullets highlight ACAT's key relevant learner pathways, mobility, and transfer system activities/results for this *2013–2014 Annual Report.*

Goals 1–5: Research/Data to Support Pathways, Access and Mobility

RESULTS

System-level Student Mobility:
In 2012, over 269,500 full-time and part-time students were in the post-secondary system in 26 publicly funded institutions in Alberta. In 2013, approximately 156,500 (just under 60%) of these students continued in the system, with approximately 16,000 of those students demonstrating system mobility by continuing at a new institution. (Note: Numbers reflect recently updated Alberta Student Number (ASN) information (e.g., account for deleted/retired ASNs) and have been rounded to the nearest half thousand.)

Student Mobility Reports:
In October 2014, ACAT posted the second year of Student Mobility Reports (2011-12 data) focused on student enrolment flow and tracking for public institutions and Alberta's six sectors in Campus Alberta and the Alberta Transfer System. These reports are posted on the "Research" page of ACAT's website and use institution-approved Learner and Enrolment Reporting System data, and are updated on a yearly basis. Additional types of mobility reports are planned.

Institution Transfer Agreements:
Currently, there are more than 80,000 transfer agreements made available to students by Alberta Transfer System member institutions via Transfer Alberta. This includes over 33,000 by-course and 900 by-program Active transfer agreements and over 46,000 Grandfathered/Terminated agreements. In 2013–14, there were over 77,000 transfer agreements.
(Note: Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.)

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR):
Between 2009/10 and 2013/14, a total of 20 institutions have reported enrolments related to PLAR credits awarded to students in Alberta.

Provincial Dual Credit Steering Committee:
ACAT Council representatives participated as post-secondary representatives on the Provincial Dual Credit Steering Committee for Alberta's Provincial Dual Credit Strategy. The Ministry/ACAT Secretariat also provided ongoing support for this work.

Research Plan and Sub-committee:
A Research Plan was approved in principle by Council in February 2015 to address key provincial data gaps in the post-secondary system. The plan prioritizes the following areas: transfer credit, admission practices, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition credit, Dual Credit and interprovincial transfer. In support of this work, a Research Sub-committee was also approved to lead the work of this plan, including increased data/information collection regarding learner pathways and mobility to inform evidence-based decision making by ACAT, government, and the system.

Goals 1–5: Pan-Canadian Activities to Support Pathways, Access and Mobility

RESULTS

Pan-Canadian Collaboration: Western Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (WestCAT) and Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT):
Advocated for the enhancement of student access and mobility and research locally and on the national level through participation on WestCAT and PCCAT. ACAT co-facilitated dialogue and provided presentations at the annual WestCAT and PCCAT conferences and business meetings in 2014. ACAT also continued regular meetings with the provincial Councils on Admissions and Transfer (CATs) in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and New Brunswick, and participated in CATs panel sessions with its provincial partners.

Through work initiated by Alberta's Articulation Committees and the Secretariat, collaboration, meeting participation, and action items between Alberta and British Columbia Articulation Committees are also underway.

Further, key discussions and focus group participation regarding interprovincial collaboration for ACAT's *Learner Pathways Modernization Initiative* occurred in 2013-14, specifically including Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario.

Provincial CATs MoU:
Provincial councils in AB, BC, NB and ON signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on October 15, 2014 to enhance higher education credit transfer and student mobility across their jurisdictions and on a pan-Canadian basis. ACAT is proud to be a part of this agreement.

ARUCC/PCCAT National Research Project:
The Phase 1 Report for the ARUCC/PCCAT *National Transcript and Transfer Credit Nomenclature Standards Research Project* was completed in June 2014. ACAT/Alberta provided economic support for the completion of this phase of the project.

Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA):
Alberta/the ACAT Secretariat participated in the annual 2014 CAPLA conference and sessions, contributed to a pan-Canadian panel presentation, and continued participation on a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Strategic Advisory Panel in support of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment's (CAPLA's) three-year *Pan-Canadian RPL Quality Assurance Project.*

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Note: Language and information in the Council membership list in the 2014-15 Annual Report is up-to-date as of March 31, 2015. Council changes for voting members and non-voting representatives identified from April 1 onwards will be reflected on Council's website and in the future 2015-16 Annual Report.

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